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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, February 8, 1935.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "PREVENTING SEPARATIONS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

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The statistics on domestic relations in this country have been worrying a good many citizens for years now. Let's see. What were the figures I heard one troubled reformer quote the other day? Seems to me he said that one out of every seven or eight marriages in America ended in a separation. He thought we all ought to take action against this bad record. He himself had plenty of ideas about ways to prevent domestic separations. For one thing, he mentioned environment. A congenial environment, he thought, had a lot to do with making any marriage permanent. And then he mentioned character and temperament. His idea was that even widely different characters could combine well, if people knew how to make the right adjustments.

Well, do you know what came to my mind during this conversation? Psychology and human relations and such matters are out of my line. Far be it from me to express any ideas on matrimony. But all this conversation set me to thinking of another kind of domestic separation in American homes that causes a lot of trouble and disappointment. Yes, and a kind that gets no publicity from the statisticians and reformers. I'm talking about food separations -- the tomato soup that curdles; the mayonnaise that separates; the custard that goes to curds and whey, and so on. Of course, I can't give you the figures on the numbers of custards that curdle in the United States every year nor the number of mayonnaise failures. But I'm sure the percentage is high enough so that those of us interested in the happiness of the American home ought to do something about it. Of course, you understand that such separations do not make food unwholesome. They simply make it less attractive.

And from what the foods experts tell me, the ideas of my reformer friend for preventing human separations will apply very well to kitchen separations.

For example, take his idea of the effect of environment on separations. The wrong surroundings will break up many a good food combination, just as they do many a happy couple. Some foods will separate if they get too cold. And some have trouble with too hot surroundings. Take custard, for example. Too much heat has put asunder many a contented custard. Too much heat or too long cooking will bring any custard dish to the parting of the ways. That applies to soft custard, baked custard, custard pie and so on. To prevent separation, cook custard over water, and keep the heat so low that the water doesn't boil. Set custard to bake in a pan of water in a moderate oven. Soft custard cook in a double boiler; keep water underneath below boiling. And as soon as the custard is done cool as quickly as possible.

A too frigid environment, on the other hand, has caused many a mayonnaise break-up. Freezing or a very cold refrigerator is not a happy place for this kind of salad dressing. To hold the oil and egg together, keep mayonnaise on the warmest shelf of the refrigerator. A cool rather than a frigid temperature keeps it best.

And speaking of mayonnaise separations, environment isn't the whole story with them. The differences in character or disposition that our friend spoke about may cause the oil to part from the rest of the mixture. The trouble may be that the oil and egg are combined too fast. For proper adjustment of these different characters, beat the oil in very slowly. And be sure you don't let the oil get the upper hand -- that is, don't use more oil than the egg can take in. A reliable recipe will tell you what proportions to use for a permanent combination.

Character differences are the cause of separations in gravy, too. Too much fat in the mixture will make gravy separate. Here again, balance and proportion makes the combination happy and too much domination by one member brings on a break-up.

Still another example of a clash in temperament is cream of tomato soup that has curdled. You can see that when an acid like tomato juice starts keeping company with milk, the two will have to make adjustments of some sort or the combination won't last long. In the old days, we used to arrange this situation by adding soda to the tomato. Soda prevented curdling, to be sure, but it changed the natural tomato flavor and destroyed the vitamin C -- one of the great assets of tomato. So nowadays we arrange the combination this way. We thicken the tomato juice with flour. Then we add it while hot to the cold milk, heat the mixture, and serve at once. Another point, cream of tomato soup is likely to curdle if it stands too long. It's not a patient soup.

This method of preventing cream-soup separations applies to other milk and vegetable soups also -- cream of asparagus soup, cream of spinach soup and also to oyster stew. Remember never to let them stand too long.

One cause of many separations is milk that has begun to turn sour. Sour characters, you know, often don't get on well with their fellow beings. So cream that is even slightly turned is likely to curdle in the coffee and milk that has started to sour often separates when you heat it for soup or sauce or a milk drink of some kind.

But here's one hopeful point to remember when separations do occur. A good beating may bring the separated parties together again in one happy family. Beat up the parted curdled soup or the chilled and separated salad dressing. Mayonnaise that seems hopeless may turn out well if you start with another egg and beat in the curdled mixture gradually.

